

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC POLICY AND LEGISLATION

THE INITIAL activities and efforts of the Committee on Public Policy and Legislation have been directed toward the drafting of procedural routines to implement the duties specifically charged to the committee by the Task Force Report. These charges were specifically as follows:

1. Systematize its internal machinery to expedite adoption by the Association, through democratic means, of an official position on the principles relative to matters of public policy.
2. Keep its membership constantly informed of all current legislative developments.
3. Establish machinery necessary to bring the influence of the Association to bear upon the matter in question. This requires a Standing Committee on Public Policy and Legislation. The committee must be adequately staffed and financed, with sufficient flexibility of discretion, within broad limits of Executive Board action, to take specific action as indicated.

The committee is attempting to transform these target objectives into tangible and workable procedures by: first, studying methods by which policies on operational and legislative matters can be adopted for practical use within the framework of the Association; second, procedures whereby action can be secured to effectively execute these policy matters, especially as they pertain to matters of legislation; and third, procedures by which the membership may be kept informed. Two objects are being kept in mind by the committee in connection with this third phase: (a) primarily for purely information purposes to the membership, and (b) to stimulate the membership, especially the various state associations to action.

Typical of the problems and questions being studied by the committee are those relating, for example, to the development of so-called blueprints of the areas of

public policy in which the Association should have an official position and the need for a statement of principles on which policy or position is based; all with the recognition that no single pattern in the development of these becomes apparent and the need for the consideration and integration of the views of the committee with other special committees, the Executive Board, the Governing Council, and, of basic importance, representative views from the membership. Procedural plans in the handling of national and state legislation of various national organizations are being studied by the committee to profit by their experiences.

As the committee actively progresses with its assignment, its difficulties and problems often complicated by the knowledge that the Association will often be "breaking new ground" are, however, offset by the realization that much of the Association's future effectiveness and growth are dependent upon many of the questions involved in the activities of this committee. Likewise, the logic and validation of the Task Force Report become increasingly evident that public health can have no real direction nor can its future be charted except within a practical framework of public policy and that the American Public Health Association is the outstanding instrument of national scope that is in a position to best serve as spokesman for public health workers on issues involving national health policy. In winding its way through the often maze of seemingly desirable procedures, the committee is encouraged and spurred on in its activities by realizing that the Association cannot remain aloof from its obligation of national health, and that it must assume an active and aggressive role in the

field of national public health policy, particularly in respect to legislation, both of its own initiation and that suggested by others.

In considering these procedural activities necessary to implement the objectives of the Task Force Report, the committee fully appreciates the achievements, past progress, and the strength and the weaknesses of the Association in the past. However, your committee fully appreciates that the Association cannot defend a nonprogressive and nonproductive program either from the technical or administrative standpoint nor elevate the status of our profession by the mere pointing of a finger at the weak links in our professional organization, neither can we rest on past laurels—a record of past achievements is not enough. The committee realizes that the

Association cannot just look back to great technical yesterdays—but we must look forward to great technical and administrative tomorrows. In the words of Justice Holmes “We must sail—sometimes with the wind, sometimes against it—but we must sail and not drift or be at anchor.”

It is the hope and expectation of the Committee on Public Policy and Legislation to submit in its report procedures that will chart the course for the future of the Association in these extremely important matters of public policy and legislation.

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Report of the chairman of the committee to the Governing Council, November 10, 1957, at the Eighty-Fifth Annual Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio.

Mental Hospital Population Down

The second year of a “turning point” is indicated in figures of patients in mental hospitals recently released by the Joint Information Service of the American Psychiatric Association and the National Association for Mental Health. For a quarter of a century before 1956 there had been an upward trend in mental hospital populations. A slight downward trend first found in 1956 has been continued in 1957. This in spite of the fact that admissions continued to rise during both years.

The figures indicate a 1957 increase in hospital personnel and larger expenditures for care and treatment, not unrelated, NAMH thinks, to the decrease in total hospital population.